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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001168

SIPDIS

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TAGS: OPRC PGOV PREL SCUL TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY'S YOUTH REMAIN POLITICALLY DISENGAGED

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, for Reasons 1.4 (b ,d)

**¶1.** (C) Summary and Comment. At a critical time in Turkey's political evolution, the country's youth are politically disengaged, due in part to their own apathy and an authoritarian society. Students, professors, journalists, and NGOs at a DVC hosted by the Ambassador discussed the situation in Turkey with Dr. Birol Caymaz of Galatasaray University and Dr. Peter Levine of the University of Maryland. A recent UN report identifying 40 percent of Turkish youth as "invisible" - they neither attend school nor work - further substantiated the DVC discussion. Recent surveys also conclude that youth political participation rates are in single digits, and conversations with politically engaged youth suggest parties see young people as sources of energy and labor, but not ideas or influence. In party politics, the deck is stacked against Turkey's youth by existing authoritarian rigidity. But that paternalistic structure goes hand-in-hand with the majority of young people's acceptance and continuation of it. Even the current political crisis has not dislodged Turkey's youth from their primary focus on finding a job or getting into university. End Summary and Comment.

**¶2.** (SBU) Dr. Caymaz observed that political parties in Turkey generally invite youth to vote, not really to participate. In the July 2007 elections, with 4.5 million new voters, parties paid homage to the young through lip service on a few key issues but kept their involvement to a minimum.

"Mobilization" of youth auxiliaries generally refers to hanging flags or posters or showing up (and being enthusiastic) at rallies. The parties persist in only tolerating "yes-men," Caymaz noted. Youth branch elections are only for show; the real decisions are taken at the top, despite democratic processes lower down. This authoritarian pattern, he said, applies to all parties.

**¶3.** (C) Justice and Development Party (AKP) Youth Auxiliary chairman Hakan Tutuncu agrees Turkey's youth are disengaged from politics, attributing it to historical scars and political party disinterest. The violence that erupted prior to the 1980 coup turned many young people off; those youth are now sending their children to university, urging them to steer clear of politics (youngsters, he adds, heed parental advice first and foremost). Until AKP's arrival, parties did not reach out to young people. AKP has made a point of involving youth at the headquarters, in all 81 provinces, and

in 857 municipalities. Tutuncu added AKP's political academies -- at which interested attendees can take classes or hear lectures from MPs or mayors -- are useful tools for educating young voters and producing polished politicians. He described the obligations of parties to youth as one of master to apprentice; parties should give responsibilities to young members and pave their path. As youth branch chairman, Tutuncu sits on AKP's executive board of 15 members, an experience that is a political education for him, as is a comparable experience for his colleagues at the provincial level. Dressed in suit and tie, Tutuncu runs his meetings like his higher-ups -- as the clear authority in the room, with other members there to murmur suggestions to him or praise him to visitors.

¶4. (C) Opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) Youth Branch Chairman Fatih Pala paints a less inspiring picture of youth on the left, explaining that their organizational structure is bound to the party headquarters in Ankara. Youth branch activities focus on helping organize party conventions and providing educational information to university political clubs. The far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) officially has no youth branch, but points to the Nationalist Hearths (Ulku Ocaklari) organization as performing that function. Ulku Ocaklari, however, denies any direct affiliation with MHP and declined requests for meetings. Dr. Caymaz maintains that MHP party leader Devlet Bahceli appoints youth leaders; party officials note that Bahceli has been careful to maintain a tight rein on young supporters, who in previous generations were instigators of

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political violence. Universities have political clubs for different ends of the spectrum, but these groups are prohibited from having formal ties to political parties.

¶5. (SBU) Other youth civil society groups exist on the margins of the political scene and provide a political training ground for their narrow membership through networking, fundraising, and organizational activities. Turkey Youth Foundation (Turkiye Genclik Federasyonu), headed by aspiring Cankaya district mayor Osman Gokcek (son of Ankara Metropolitan Mayor and AKP member Melih Gokcek) has predictable ties to AKP. The Great Youth Association (Buyuk Genclik Dernegi) consists of young supporters of CHP black sheep Mustafa Sarigul. Young Bee (Genc Ari) has its roots in the Motherland Party (Anavatan). Young Leaders' Association (Genc Lider) consists of youth from the center-right. These groups vary in their interests, but for the most part organize services of interest to young people, such as concerts, soccer games, or classes; a few lobby parliament on youth issues. Unsal Genc of Genc Ari observed that youth, due to the legacy of the 1980 coup, the lack of reliable political information and family pressures, are politically inactive and more concerned about finding a job or getting into university.

¶6. (C) The recently released UN Human Development Report (HDR) on youth paints a bleak picture of political engagement by Turkey's youth. The report notes 40 percent of Turkey's youth (5 million people aged 15-24) out of Turkey's total population of nearly 72 million are neither employed nor attending school. The societal disenfranchisement of these "invisible youth" is having ripple effects on Turkey's political sphere, according to the Association of Young Businessmen (ANGIAD). Less than 5 percent of Turkey's young people participate in the political process, and three-quarters of the remaining youth do not expect to participate in any political party in the future. The UN report notes that only 4 percent of youth even participate in civil society activities. Dr. Caymaz cited Bilgi University's 2004 survey of 20,000 young people that showed a mere 1.7 percent of Turkey's youth participates in politics.

¶7. (SBU) HDR Turkey coordinator Aygen Aytac notes that cynicism and distrust towards politicians and political

institutions is common among Turkey's young people, who feel powerless to modify their situation and see their primary concerns - namely employment - being neglected by those in power. According to ANGIAD, the institutions most trusted by youth (as by adults) in Turkey are not political, but rather military and religious. Aytac explained that young people's exclusion from the decision making process begins at home, where 80 percent live and where they are unable to assert their independence over even the most banal household issues.

Dr. Caymaz agreed that in the family, the father is always right; throughout school and at university, the teacher is always right. At the DVC, one professor, frustrated with what he perceived as a culture that breeds passivity, challenged young people in the audience to be courageous, take the floor and speak up.

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